

# Washington Seeks “Regime Change” in Malaysia: US-backed Opposition Complicit in Corruption and “Dirty Tricks”

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Region: [Asia](#)

Global Research, February 28, 2013

In the coming General Election, condemning the Barisan Nasional (BN) as “totally corrupt” would be the Pakatan Rakyat’s (PR) main line of attack. It will be used as a rallying cry to oust the incumbent. Corruption is undoubtedly a major challenge. There is elite corruption in both the public and private sectors. There is petty corruption within various strata of society.

It is because it is a challenge that the government recognises combating corruption as one of the seven National Key Result Areas (NKRAs). And since 2004 a number of significant measures have been implemented, among them the establishment of 14 special anti-corruption courts with the mandate to adjudicate all corruption cases within 12 months; the enactment of the Whistleblower Act; the signing of Corporate Integrity Pledges and

Integrity Pacts; and the acceptance of open tenders publicised through the media for procurement exercises thus enhancing transparency and accountability. The endorsement of Transparency International’s Election Integrity Pledge, an affirmation of the government’s commitment to electoral ethics, is the latest example of its present battle against corruption.

At the same time, there has been a marked increase in the number of arrests of those allegedly involved in corruption including former political leaders, highly placed public servants, and top-notch corporate figures. Givers as well as takers of bribes are now nabbed regularly. It is because of these sustained efforts that Michael Hershman, one of the founders of Transparency International observed in an article in the Huffington Post (June 22 2012) that Malaysia has a “comprehensive anti-corruption system.”

In this regard, it is worth noting that Malaysia’s fight against corruption has been going on for more than four decades. Malaysia is one of the first countries in the Global South to have established an anti-corruption agency and formulated an anti-corruption law way back in 1967. Even before 2004, a number of Federal Ministers, Mentris Besar and State Executive Councillors have been tried and convicted for corruption.

Nonetheless, as many of us have been arguing for some time now much more can be done to curb this social malaise. Apart from effective enforcement that metes out stern punishment to the wrongdoer regardless of his status, we should also address some of the underlying causes of corruption such as the widening gap between the “have-a-lot” and the “have-a-little” which engenders a widespread feeling of relative deprivation which in turn prompts people to justify their corrupt acts. To make it worse, elite opulence which has become more pronounced in our society in recent years also feeds into this vice. At the same time, both the government and the opposition should craft a mechanism for financing

general elections which would eliminate donations from business entities.

The public financing of elections as a concept was accepted by the Dewan Rakyat in April 2012. Whatever new measures are adopted to combat corruption, Malaysians should not be duped into believing that changing the government of the day is THE solution. Other democracies in Asia have tried. In India the Indian National Congress was ousted through the ballot-box in the seventies on an anti-corruption, anti-authoritarianism wave; the people discovered soon afterwards that the successor government was incapable of curbing the scourge. Similarly, in Japan, the people have come to realise that getting rid of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and replacing it with some other party has not helped to minimise the prevalence of graft which is embedded to a large extent in the incestuous relationship between business and legislative politics.

There is a reason why regime change per se in most cases does not result in the eradication of corruption. Regime change revolves around political actors. Political actors are focused upon power. And power, as the ancient adage goes, corrupts.

Even in our country we have seen this happening with the opposition parties which are now in power in four states. Vociferous opponents of corruption for the longest time, these parties are now forced to grapple with allegations of shady contracts, zoning irregularities and questionable land deals. Their claim to integrity is being challenged by segments of their own constituencies.

Indeed, how can Pakatan Rakyat project itself as a champion of probity when it is led by a Machleone (a Machiavellian Chameleon) with such a tarnished record on issues of ethics? When he was in power — an overly ambitious Cabinet Minister — he was allegedly involved in money politics and cronyism on a massive scale. In his book, *The Mahathir Legacy A Nation Divided, a Region at Risk* (Allen & Unwin, 2003) Ian Stewart observes, “While Anwar’s followers — as witnessed by myself and other journalists — were handing out packets of money to acquire the support of UMNO division leaders in his 1993 campaign against Ghafar Baba, Anwar himself was winning over influential people in the party by promising positions in the administration he would form when he took over from Dr. Mahathir.” (page 23).

Pakatan supporters insist that Anwar has changed after his incarceration from 1998 to 2004 and now walks the straight and narrow. In other words, like Saul on the road to Damascus, Anwar on the road to Putrajaya has become a paragon of virtue. Really? If that is so, how does one explain his September 16th saga in 2008 which was a blatant attempt to topple a legitimately elected government through the backdoor, employing allegedly unethical tactics? And what about the electoral fraud within his party, Parti Keadilan Rakyat, in 2010 or his approach to the recent defections of two Barisan Nasional leaders in Sabah to his side?

What this shows is that Anwar and Pakatan can lay no claim to the moral high ground in the battle against corruption. Voters should understand this. They should evaluate them for what they are and not be mesmerised by their words.

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